

care and in the management of common chronic conditions.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT PLAYS AN
IMPORTANT ROLE

How does performance measurement affect actual performance in health care delivery? To answer this question, the researchers conducted another analysis focused solely on the health indicators that matched the performance measures used by the VA. They found that VA patients had a substantially greater chance of receiving the indicated care for these health conditions than did patients in the national sample. They also observed that performance measurement has a “spillover effect” that influences care: VA patients were more likely than patients in the national sample to receive recommended care for conditions related to those on which performance is measured. For example, VA outperformed the national sample on administering influenza vaccinations, a process on which the system tracks performance. However, it also outpaced the national sample on other, related immunization and preventive care processes that are not measured. This provides strong evidence that, if one tracks quality, it will improve not only in the area tracked but overall as well.

THESE RESULTS HAVE IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS

The implications of this study go far beyond differences in quality of care between the VA and other health care systems. The research shows that it is possible to improve quality of care and that specific improvement initiatives play an important role. First, health care leaders must embrace and implement information technology systems that support coordinated health care. Second, they should adopt monitoring systems that measure performance and hold managers accountable for providing recommended care. If other health care providers followed the VA’s lead, it would be a major step toward improving the quality of care across the U.S. health care system.

THE VA OUTPERFORMS THE NATIONAL SAMPLE ON NEARLY
EVERY MEASURE

Health indicator	VA score	National sample score	Difference
Overall	67	51	16
Chronic care	72	59	13
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	69	59	10
Coronary artery disease	73	70	3
Depression	80	62	18
Diabetes	70	57	13
Hyperlipidemia	64	53	11
Hypertension	78	65	13
Osteoarthritis	65	57	8
Preventive care	64	44	20
Acute care	53	55	-2
Screening	68	46	22
Diagnosis	73	61	12
Treatment	56	41	15
Follow-up	72	58	14
VA-targeted performance measures	67	43	24
VA-target-related performance measures	70	58	12
Measures unrelated to VA targets	55	50	5

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll. The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXTENSION OF MORNING
BUSINESS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that morning business be extended until 3 p.m. with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I am sometimes asked back in Illinois how the Senate can have morning business in the afternoon. I still can’t answer that question, but we will continue to have it this afternoon.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise to speak in morning business and address the issue which has become central to our debate about the domestic agenda for America. There is a lot of time being spent by the President and Members of Congress talking about the privatization of Social Security. Social Security is a very important program for millions of Americans. It brought dignity to senior citizens and gave them a chance in their retirement years to live with enough money to get by.

Before Social Security, if a person were fortunate enough to save enough money during their lifetime, they were OK. If they happened to have a generous family, the family would bring their mother and father to live with them in their later years. That was one of the outcomes. But if things went poorly, a lot of senior citizens before Social Security ended up in county poorhouses. They are still sitting around out there. They are not used for that purpose anymore, but you can find them across America. That is where you went when there was no place else to go, no money to take care of yourself, and no children to take care of you.

Along came Franklin Roosevelt back in the 1930s, who said: I think we have learned a lesson here. We need to create a program that gives everybody a chance during their lifetime to pay into Social Security with the guarantee that when you retire, there will always be some money there to help you. Nobody is going to get rich on Social Security. I don’t think they ever could. But the idea was there would be this thing they could count on, kind of a bedrock savings plan for Americans—more of an insurance policy than a savings plan. It worked.

For the 60 years or more we have had Social Security, it has made every single payment with cost-of-living adjustments, and seniors in America, many of them, lead comfortable lives because Social Security helps. You cannot live on it alone—I guess you could, but you would barely scrape by—but with Social Security you have something to count on.

You do not care if the corporation you worked for for 30 or 40 years goes

bankrupt and takes away your retirement benefits. You do not care in this respect: You know Social Security will still pay you. If you get bad news about that pension plan you invested in for a long time taking a bad turn and not having enough money to pay you what you expected, at least there is Social Security.

Over time, things change in America. We live longer. Thanks to good health habits, good medicine, people are living longer lives. A Social Security Program anticipated to pay out for a few years pays for many years, so we have adjusted for many years. The amount of money paid into it, the benefits paid out, and the eligibility age for retirement have all changed, but Social Security is still there. It keeps on ticking because we count on it so much.

Along comes President Bush who says we have a problem with Social Security. We have to do something. Some call it a crisis. Some call it a challenge. Some call it a problem. But the argument is, we have to do something. You just cannot leave it alone.

What would happen if we left Social Security alone? What if Congress said: We are not going to do a thing to Social Security this year, nothing. We are not going to change one word in the law, not going to change any of the benefits, any of the contributions, what would happen to Social Security? It would make every single promised payment to every single retiree in America every single month of every single year with a cost-of-living adjustment until at least 2042, 37 years from now. The program is strong, and we have to talk about making it stronger.

The President proposes privatizing Social Security, changing the concept of Social Security. Instead of paying payroll tax and receiving your Social Security benefits, the President suggests taking part of that payroll tax and investing it. If you are fortunate, you will do better. Your investment has risk, but the President believes by and large most people will do better.

There is nothing wrong with savings and investment. Everyone should take that seriously for their own lives and for their families. We do in my household. For my wife and me, that is working, saving for retirement, for ourselves, for our family. It is a smart thing to do. But what we do is over and above what we pay into Social Security. Social Security is still there. Members of Congress pay it, incidentally. Despite some of the talk radio comments otherwise, Members of Congress pay Social Security, as my wife does on her job. And we have some savings accounts. It is a smart thing to do. We have done pretty well. We are not getting rich, but we will be comfortable.

Now comes the President and says take the money out of Social Security, put it in the stock market. The obvious question is, if you take the money out of Social Security and out of the trust fund, how will it make its payments?